

# Day Care for the Elderly

Most people are only recently becoming sensitive to psychological trauma suffered by senior citizens of our community who, because of age, are no longer able to keep up with the jet-set, automated world of today. Society has generally shown a tendency to discard people once they reach the age of 65 and over despite their contributions and abilities. Instead of being treated graciously because of the wealth of information and experience they have acquired over the years, senior citizens are often shoved aside like old, used cars.

In the last few years, however, legislation has been adopted authorizing the creation of programs for senior citizens to remedy this situation. As a result, Senior Citizens Programs have begun to spring up in city after city. But even these programs are restricted in a sense because they are usually designed only for senior citizens who are healthy and active people.

Emmanuel Day Care Center is sure to arouse widespread interest among those involved in the field of social work and mental therapy simply because it is a departure from the norm. Housed in the Emanuel Baptist Church complex, this center is probably the first Senior Citizens Center in New Jersey geared to caring for senior citizens who are invalids, infirmed, or incapacitated. Emmanuel is not a nursing home.

Mrs. Nellie Grier, an active senior citizen in Newark, is founder and director of the center.

The impetus for the program dates back to 1974, when Mrs. Grier was director of Fulb Neighborhood House for Senior Citizens. Mrs. Nance, a volunteer aide for Fulb, brought the case of a grief-stricken school crossing guard to Mrs. Grier's attention. The young woman was afraid to leave her paralyzed mother at home alone, so she kept her locked in an automobile nearby each day until her tour of duty ended.

Mrs. Grier immediately offered assistance inviting the hurried woman to bring her mother to the center each day so that she could observe the activities provided for regular members of the center. Within months the invalid senior, once a shut-in victim, gradually regained her speech and shortly thereafter joined the center's singing group. She later recovered sufficiently to join the Essex County Senior Citizens Educational Program, where she received honors.

As other shut-in seniors heard about what had happened they began seeking admission to Mrs. Grier's center.

Seizing upon the opportunity to specialize, Mrs. Grier developed a proposal that called for the creation of a day care service for handicapped senior citizens. The Emmanuel Day Care Center for Senior Citizens was given life through a CETA grant of \$66,647, which pays for administrative and operational costs.

A normal day at the center begins at 8 A.M. after the bus completes its first run delivering members of the frail to the front door. They come in one in a wheel chair, another assisted by the part-time driver attendant, and others with various physical ailments making their way to the large meeting and dining room. One might see a little "talking" woman, babbling and giving a good account of herself to herself. Or notice another member sitting quietly smiling and returning happy "good mornings" to everyone who speaks to her. A nurse who carries an air of confidence and complete control about her seems satisfied that all is well with her senior patients as she moves among them, helping to adjust herself, arranging another's hair, and moving the wheel chair senior to her favorite position at the table.

After observing for a half hour one gets the feeling that its going to be a wonderful day at the center and that everybody has reason to be happy, especially when the kitchen will be serving grits, eggs, toast, coffee or tea for breakfast.

The high point of the morning session occurs after breakfast when the seniors sit around and listen to an aide deliver an important spiritual message. The discussion leader, who is noted for becoming totally engrossed in his morning lectures, is often asked to bring it to an end before it runs into the lunch hour. The spiritual enthusiasm runs high among the members during these morning discussions. One rather knowledgeable senior appears to dominate both the discussions and volunteer prayer period. When she talks to the floor, she prays with such a melodious tonal quality that she appears to be literally singing praises. As she carries on in her beautiful sing-song manner, loud "amen" flow from her fellow senior members.

Twenty-five senior citizens, formerly shut-in victims, have come together to participate in a program that has added substance to their lives.

Participation in the centers' activities occurs on a three-month rotation basis due to limited funds. Mrs. Grier says, "It only brings grief and sadness to many of our members who must return to their shut-in existence until their names come up again for reassignment."

A host of recreational and educational activities are offered at the center such as arts and crafts, monthly birthday parties, field trips to local parks, museums, libraries and concerts. Dance therapy is also taught by an instructor who comes in once a week.

Every Sunday morning at 6 A.M. Emanuel broadcasts a radio program on station WNR (jointly with Mrs. Kitty Taylor, director of Newark's Elder Division of the United Community Corporation), explaining the nature of the center and generally discussing problems faced by senior citizens.

For Mrs. Grier, Emanuel Day Care Center is like a "dream come true." □

